# MANCHESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

## "Theological Study as a Preparation for the Ministry."

# AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

## REV. W. E. ADDIS, M.A.,

ON THE

## OPENING OF THE SESSION

## 1894-95.

*"The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular Theological doctrines."*

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# ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

A minister in active work called to address a body of young men who are engaged in theological study, naturally comes with no little fear and self-distrust to the performance of his task. Your opportunities of familiar acquaintance with the results of research and the tendencies of the spirit of the time are, at least from some points of view, necessarily greater than his own. It is your happiness to live in a great University, where all the various forms of learning meet and find their home, in friendly association with each other. On the one hand, you are able to follow out special and favourite lines of enquiry, and in doing so you have great libraries at your command, comrades who are travelling along the same road, famous and experienced guides able and ready to direct you and to help you on your way. On the other hand, you have the privilege of meeting those who are exploring regions more attractive to them than to you. They are regions, it may be, which you will never know minutely, but of which you ought to know something. You can, in short, make a good beginning in accurate and thorough acquaintance with one or two departments of knowledge, while you escape the narrowness and the pedantry which are apt to mar the work of the mere specialist. It is quite in order that we who have no learned leisure should ask you about the newest and best books, and the prevailing schools of theological opinion. But what is the information which we can give you? Nothing, even at the utmost, save what you can learn incomparably better from the tutors and professors at whose feet you sit.

No doubt a minister can always speak with the authority of experience on the requirements and difficulties, the manifold

perils, and the still more manifold blessings of the pastoral calling. But it may well be questioned, whether such counsel and advice would not do more harm than good. "Sufficient for the day is the evil," yes, and the good "thereof." The time will come for all, and has, perhaps, come already for one or two of you, when the passage from the cloister to the world is imminent, and at the moment of transition you will welcome a few words of friendly counsel from your elder brethren in the ministry. For the present, the best preparation which you can make lies in the utmost use of the great opportunities for study now open to you, and ere long to be partially, though but partially, closed. Just now serious distraction from study and premature consideration of practical work would be an evil, tending to defeat, rather than to promote, your success. When you leave the College for the pulpit, the best student will, as a rule, prove to be the most effective minister. Unless you train yourselves to habits of study so strong that they can maintain themselves in circumstances far more trying than those in which you find yourselves to-day, you cannot hope to hold your own in after years as effective teachers of others. Moreover, study faithfully pursued will carry you beyond its own immediate sphere, and become the instrument of moral discipline. Need I say that the self-control which a good student practises here, his love of discipline, his spirit of charity and large-hearted toleration to his equals in age, his ready and grateful obedience to those whom God's providence has placed over him, and who would gladly serve his highest interests, are in themselves an invaluable preparation for the care of souls?

Now, it is the mention of moral qualifications gained here, used and growing by the use elsewhere, that leads me to introduce an aspect of your work which we may profitably consider together. I put aside altogether the details of ministerial duty. For the reasons which have been given, let alone my own

incompetence, I refrain from addressing you on methods of preaching, on the visitation of the sick, the reclamation of the fallen, the care of the young, and a hundred kindred subjects. Passing over these, I desire to fix your attention on that soul of religion which is, or should be, common to students and ministers. Let us try to place ourselves there at the centre, and from that vantage ground to take a general view of science, and particularly of theological science, as it affects the dispositions which you are to carry with you into the labours of the pastorate.

It is true, and we all eagerly recall the fact, that in this College theological study is absolutely free. When you enter these walls no one dreams of asking what your religious opinions are; no one has the right (and who has the desire?) to impose any doctrinal test. Nevertheless, there is a test, the strictest and most searching of all tests which you and I must constantly and seriously apply to ourselves. There is a conviction which we must hold, unless all our toil is to be in vain. I cannot claim to formulate in your behalf the creed which is all the more real, because it never can be written or spoken or even thought fully out. Still, that is no reason why we should not strive, on an occasion like this, to express the thought which lies deepest in our hearts, provided always we remember that in such a matter all words fail, and that no one can quite interpret his own inmost thought, much less bear himself as the authorised spokesman of others. With this preliminary apology, I venture to describe the ground on which we stand as follows: We believe in religion, and by that we mean the possibility and necessity of conscious communion between God and man. We believe that the bond which unites heaven to earth is laid deep in that spiritual nature which constitutes the essential unity of God and man. The spiritual nature common to God and man makes communion possible; the limited nature of man's being, the imperfection which cleaves to all that he is and does, responds to the appeal of

God's Holy Spirit, and impels him to seek divine communion. He knows that he is bound fast in law, that he is subject to material things; and often he seems to be the sport of forces which may, at any moment, rob him of his dearest possessions, and which apparently threaten his personal existence with annihilation. At the same time, because he is a person, he is aware of his own superiority to all material things. Frail as a reed he may be, but he is a reed which thinks, and that point of contrast involves infinite difference between him and them. Not only so: he is possessed of will, and by his reason apprehends the moral law. Thus a new vista of possibilities opens out before him; through the uplifted veil he looks into another sphere of being, for the moral law is of universal authority, and therefore transcends all limits of time and space. Yet, the conflict is not over: rather the real conflict begins just when man perceives the majesty of the moral law and the greatness of his own vocation to obey and fulfil it. For the dualism still remains: the contradiction between man's position as a moral being who is raised above the world and contains it in his thought, and his position as a physical being who is a mere atom in the universe, is a problem which presses for solution. Nay, the dualism of which I have been speaking enters into the will itself. The aspiration after moral good is accompanied by perpetual failure and disappointment. Moreover, the will thirsts for an infinite perfection, which can never be attained in the supreme degree. From this conflict we are redeemed by the power of that perfect trust and joyful self-surrender to a reconciling God and Father, which the New Testament calls faith. We apprehend God as the eternal righteousness and love. We learn that we are made by him, and can never find perfect rest save in him. Then and only then we are redeemed from the world, and find that all things are ours. He who by his voice within calls us to obedience, and through our own personality manifests himself to us as a Person, is the same

God who rules the material universe. He blots out our iniquity. He invites us to become partakers of his own nature. He enables us to make our motives one with his, and to labour for the spread of his kingdom, or, in other words, to promote the reign of God as love in our own hearts and in the hearts of others. At last we have found the key which unlocks the mystery of human existence. While we struggle upwards, an infinite power is enlisted on our side, and we are sustained by the arm which supports the universe. To those who love God, all things work together for good. Their interests are not divided from those of their brethren. On the contrary, it is by dying to the selfish and constrained life "according to the flesh" that they rise to that fuller and nobler life which has the freedom of the spirit. They reign, just in proportion as they make themselves the servants of all. They have entered into eternal life, because they desire, if need be, to lay down their lives for the brethren. In all things they are free from the trammels of the world, one with the order of the world.

It is only, of course, at its final stage that religion admits of being stated in such terms, and in reality I have been trying to describe the revelation of God in Christ, our redemption through him, and our incorporation into the kingdom of God. But in all religion we find some dim presentiment of the truth completely manifested in him to whom all history was looking forward and has been looking back. "All men," says Homer, "stand in need of the gods;" and Melancthon was fond of quoting the line as the witness of the soul to God.

We will, then, take for granted that we are agreed on the nature of religion, so far at least as its general principles are concerned. If that is so, two things are evident which have a most profound bearing on preparation for the ministry. First, religion is proved by spiritual experience. To those who live destitute of this experience the proof of religion is impossible.

No amount of metaphysical reasoning, no historical argument, can be of any avail. You might as well discourse on colour to those who have been born blind, or dilate on love to one whose heart had never been stirred by noble and generous affection. Observe that the principle for which I am contending stands quite apart from the question of the validity of the proofs alleged for the existence of God. Intellectual belief in the existence of God does not suffice for the very beginning of religion. A man cannot be religious till he feels and knows that God is his God, and his religion grows purer and stronger the more that unity of mind, will, and motive with the mind, will, and motive of God becomes the end of existence. Religion culminates in him who said "I and the Father are one," and who prayed for a unity which was to bind the disciples to each other and to their master, that all might be perfect in one. In the second place, a Christian minister's success depends chiefly on the extent to which he lives by prayer, constantly translating itself into character and action. On the lower levels of religion men have been accepted as the interpreters of the divine will, because they belonged to a sacred family, because they had been set apart by some external authority, because they were possessed of secret knowledge, magical it might be, or theological, but, in any case, knowledge which did not necessarily raise him who had it above a cold and unworthy life. The Christian minister can trust to no such adventitious help. Again, he is no mere mystic. He has to promote the kingdom of God; and how? By speaking with that authority which is the heritage of those who "believe and therefore speak." "The signs of an Apostle," says St. Paul, "were done in me . . . in much patience." So St. John writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, which we have handled, of the word of life, . . . declare we unto you, that you may have fellowship with us,

and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ." Let no man dream that the church is a mere school of moral and religious teaching. No. It begins with a life—the life of Christ—and it is continued and propagated by the life of those who have been redeemed from sin and self through him. Hence the Church is Christ's body. It is the company of all faithful people, and they manifest Christ's spirit of self-sacrificing love precisely as the body, by gesture and look and word, discloses the mind and temper of the spirit which quickens it. Such is the Christian life; and a minister is one who makes himself the servant of the congregation in its efforts to spread the divine life in the world. If we are ministers without striving to realize this ideal, then we are like salt which has lost its savour. The salt which does not season is good for nothing. It can never be used as food. So it is with us, if we are set free from the toils and cares of business and yet having no spiritual life in ourselves, are unable to be the means of imparting it to others.

We may now take a step forward. We have seen that religion is to be carefully distinguished from all conviction which is merely intellectual. We have seen further that it is a minister's principal function to awaken and to promote in others that spiritual life which has been implanted in his own soul. We now ask, how religious conviction is likely to be affected by the scientific study of theology? The result may, I think, be briefly expressed thus: All knowledge confirms belief in the reality of religion, because religion proves itself in the end to be consistent with all knowledge. Further, where scientific knowledge seems at first sight fatal to religion it, in reality, purifies and intensifies it by bringing it to a truer and more consistent knowledge or consciousness of its own nature. It has been sometimes said that religious belief is an illusion. If that were the case, science would slowly but surely wrest its territory from it, till at last

the citadel and centre of religious belief was in the hands of the enemy. There are indeed those who would tell us that something of this sort has taken or is taking place. It is argued, with some plausibility, that for centuries religion has been retreating before the forces of Rationalism, so that the final destruction of religion needs nothing but time for its accomplishment. If we grant that this is fact, then we cannot reasonably defend religion any longer. I venture to assert that it is the precise opposite of the fact, and in the constant benefits which religion derives from science, I find the most convincing confirmation of all spiritual experience. Let me try to illustrate my meaning.

I will begin with one or two well-worn commonplaces drawn from the results of physical science. We are all familiar with the way in which new views of the outward universe have altered the thoughts of men about man and God. Our forefathers believed that this earth was the centre of creation; we know that it is like a grain of sand amid myriad worlds. Consequently, it is urged that man's redemption from sin to the life of God has forfeited its central place, so that St. Paul's language, when he describes the Christian warfare as "a spectacle to men and angels," is almost grotesquely out of date. Again, the reign of universal law has been accepted as the order of the universe. Hence, miracles are said to be discredited, or at least come to be regarded with suspicion, while criticism of the documents which attest them has, in the opinion of many, undermined the foundations on which they were thought to rest. This is in a special degree the case with the alleged miracle of Christ's birth. Well, if religion be a partly material thing, these objections, which might easily be multiplied, are forcible. If, on the other hand, the progress of religion has been a growth in pure spirituality, if God in Christ is reconciling the world to himself, then truer views of physical fact and physical law clear away confusion between the spiritual and material, and display the genuine

nature and power of Christianity, as the absolute religion. We are reminded that man's central place in the universe has nothing to do with the position of the earth in space. Man is the centre of all things, because he is capable of holding all things within his thought, and still more because he can rise above space and time into the eternal life of God. Nor is the importance of our redemption in any way abated, if we assume that the inhabitants of countless worlds unknown to us partake in the same supreme blessing. Material things are limited, and the share which falls to each is necessarily lessened by the number who share in them. With spiritual good it is quite otherwise. Our own love is not confined within material boundaries. We do not divide our affection between our children. We love each with a whole and undivided heart. Surely, therefore, it is gross materialism to think that the redemption of man in Christ has ceased to be an object of supreme interest because the earth is small, and because the rational creatures of God and the company of the redeemed may be, in a fuller sense than the first Christians knew, "a great multitude which no man can number." And what have miracles to do with the place of Christ as founder and perpetual head of the kingdom of God on earth? Miracles, by their definition, belong to the category of things seen with the bodily eye, and Christ came to give us the pure heart which sees God. We need not discuss the evidence for his miraculous birth. In any case, that birth, were it ever so miraculous, is a birth "according to the flesh." We owe our allegiance to him, not on account of his relations, normal or abnormal, to his earthly parents, but on account of his relations to God and to man as a spiritual being. He was, says the apostle, "marked out as the Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness." He is the first of many brethren, "born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of the will of God." All this is clearly affirmed in the teaching of our Lord himself. None the less, we owe a

debt of gratitude to the science and criticism which are driving us back from the materialism in which we would fain intrench ourselves, to the impregnable fortress of spiritual religion.

Not only has increasing knowledge forced us to take the Christian religion at its true value, viz., as the dispensation of the Spirit: it has also taught us that God has revealed himself in the whole course of human history, so that all things bear witness to Christ. The science of Comparative Religion only began to be a little more than a century ago. Wonderful indeed is the change which it has wrought. In former times some thought that heathen religions were delusions due to malignant demons. Others regarded them as the worthless fruit of childish ignorance and folly. Others found a sufficient explanation of their origin in the selfish craft of priests and magistrates, eager to rob and enslave the rude and credulous multitude. The most generous theory which had any vogue, saw in the forms of natural religion some fragments of higher truth, saved from the wreck of that primeval revelation which had been made to Adam. Already, in great measure, the time has passed away when men of competent knowledge and open mind can accept any one of these views as a complete explanation of the facts. The study of religion in its humblest forms, the enthusiasm, for instance, which is given to the examination of folk-lore, springs from the persuasion, more or less explicit, that God has been gradually revealing himself to the whole family of mankind and educating his children, as they are able to bear it. The religions of the world are no mere chaos. They form an ordered and organic whole in which the lower and more material is the indispensable condition from which the nobler and more spiritual form was to be evolved. That is the reason why the study of all religion is fascinating and instructive. Nothing has been in vain. The savage and the barbarian have toiled and laboured that we might inherit the blessing, and that they without us "should not be made perfect."

We gauge the value of all religion by contemplating religion in its final development; just as we cannot study the embryo apart from the perfect body to which it tends and from which it derives all its importance; just as infancy owes its power over the heart to its mysterious promise of a future, half concealed, half revealed; just as all rational consideration of the universe implies an "immanent teleology," acknowledged in the current phrases even of those who set themselves to deny it. Again, the same idea of progressive revelation has been applied to the Bible itself and has bestowed upon it a new life and a new unity. A new life: for everything has its place and its meaning; the imperfect morality of tribal religion, the prophetic belief in a God of righteousness, the law which seemed reactionary but was in reality an advance, because it made the ethical monotheism of the prophets the common heritage of the Jewish people and familiarised them with the conception of God's reign upon earth. A new unity: because we are now enabled to see that we need no longer take a single passage here and there, isolate it from its context and wrest it from its natural meaning, that we may turn it into a prediction of the coming Christ. Rather, all the prophets and all the law were preparing the way for him in whom God was to reveal himself as love, and who is now gathering into one "the children of God scattered throughout the world." Once more, besides our new insight into the history of religion without and within the Bible, we may now come with a larger and more liberal intelligence to the study of Christian dogma. We cannot attribute to it a final and absolute worth. We are learning to distinguish elements of Greek philosophical speculation from the religion of Christ with which they were mingled. We cannot, however, renounce or unduly depreciate the religious philosophy of the past, unless we are prepared to forego all religious philosophy of our own. Athanasius could not have arisen without St. Paul, or Augustine without Athanasius,

or Luther without Augustine, or the best religious thought of to-day without Luther. We cannot, without spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy, cut ourselves loose from the past. We cannot face the problems of the present save in the wisdom and the strength which is borne into us from the fulness of the ages. We cannot be original, till first we have steeped ourselves in the originality of others.

Hitherto we have been looking back, and we can but glance rapidly at the progress and perfection of the kingdom of heaven, which still remains to be accomplished. We are not meant for contemplation but for action, and the spirit of Christ moves ever forward, subduing all things to him. This was intended from the beginning. True, we cannot add to the supreme trust that God is love, and through the kingdom of God on earth, through the perpetual succession of those who have the mind of the master, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, speaks to each one of us and touches us with healing hand. But the trust in God as love admits of endless applications. A new spirit of humanity is abroad, and those of us who are not very old can remember how wonderfully the sense of responsibility for the ignorance, the sufferings, aye, and the sins of our brethren, has increased in definiteness, in intensity, in range. This is the very fulfilment of the Saviour's promise, "He who believeth in me the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father." We have no cause to fear that the spirit of humanitarianism will drive out religion. Did not the first disciples picture Jesus himself as one who healed the sick and comforted the mourner? Man shall not live by bread alone; but we must change evil conditions and relieve the bodily wants, with their appeal of agony, before the spiritual life can emerge. Be sure that it will emerge. Do not doubt that the cry of the soul for God will find its voice. The kingdom of God has come, and nevertheless is still to come, with a power unknown to us.

"Howbeit," says the wise apostle, "that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural."

To sum up. A religious teacher and pastor is to be fitted for his work, first of all and above all, by his own experience of the divine life within himself. He must be one who has seen the heavenly vision and not been disobedient to it. His call from the people must be preceded by a call from God, and he must feel that the preaching of the gospel is a necessity laid upon him. He is to give himself, his best and highest self, to the ministry of the gospel. But on that very account he is to be trained for greater efficiency in his work. The experience within is to be enlarged and enriched by that universal experience which is recorded in the whole history of the race, and pre-eminently in Holy Scripture. It is his office to exhibit the eternal truths of religion in their conformity with all that we can know of ourselves, or of the world in which God has placed us. In a time like this, when men's hearts are failing them for fear, and they are apt to think religious belief impossible, because somewhat of its outward form has been changed, the instructed teacher will distinguish between the substance and the accidents. He will turn the eyes of his hearers to the "things which cannot be shaken." He will feel and inspire belief in that more perfect order which the Builder of all things constructs from the ruins of the past. It is for you to understand how the dogmas of the past have grown up, to enter into the truths which the great men of the past have striven to express through them, and so to save the present generation from the blind worship of words and forms on the one hand, from the violence of vulgar iconoclasm upon the other. The truth is no private possession of yours, or of a sect. You are to be the servants of the truth, the ministers of him who is the truth. You are free to follow the truth whithersoever it may lead, and you are placed in a home which is instinct with the gracious memories of the past, and may well suggest the humility

and reverence without which wisdom cannot be. May you use your youth, your strength, your great and manifold opportunities, better, far better than we used the opportunities granted to us in days that are gone for ever. May you promote, better, far better than we are doing, the kingdom of God, till you change the best things of which we dream—yes, and the things of which we are too dull to dream—into practical realities, into the things which God has done.